Storing of seized ammunition and explosives in Ordnance Depot, Srinagar

*643. SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:†
SHRI SUSHILKUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the report appearing in the 'Pioneer' of April 2, 1994 under the caption "Fatal mistake in storing explosives", pointing out that the Army authorities may have committed a fatal mistake by storing ammunition and explosives seized from militants in the Field ordnance Depot at Srinagar where an explosion had killed a group of 14 officers, including the Military Intelligence Chief on March 29, 1994;

(b) if so, what are the regulations for storing such ammunition at different depots, and whether Government agree with the views expressed in the news report; and

(c) what is Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI MALLIKARJUN): (a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

The Government have seen the press report referred to in the Question.

The explosives on display had not been stored in the Field Ordnance Depot, Srinagar. These had been taken to the Depot on the morning of that day for the purpose of display to certain visiting Army officers.

Explosives are stored in accordance with the Magazine Regulations and the Regulation for Storage of Ammunition and Explosives in the Field.

SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA: Madam, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether it is a fact that the blast went off at a time when Major General Eustace Willium Fernandez was inspecting arms, ammunitions and explosives seized from the armed bands and terrorists at the Field Ordnance Depot and if it is so, whether the Government sees any sabotage behind this blast, a well-planned outrage, for which the Jamait-ul-Mujahideen, a militant outfit operating in the Valley, had claimed the responsibility? I would also like to know what steps have since been taken to apprehend the saboteurs and conspirators. Part (b) of my question is why precautions were not taken to ensure that such arms are not dumped at such a vulnerable place, which is the constant target for attack. What are the precautions and do's and don'ts laid down in this regard?

SHRI MALLIKARJUN: Madam, it is a fact that when the explosion took place, Major General Fernandez was there. The hon. Member has asked whether the Government sees sabotage behind this blast and somebody has taken the responsibility. At the moment, we cannot say anything in this regard because a Court of Inquiry has been ordered. We are waiting for the outcome of the Court of Inquiry. Madam, these explosives which were seized from the terrorists and militants, were not stored in the Field Ordnance Depot. They were stored somewhere in the military regiment. These seized explosives were brought on the same morning for being diplayed to those officers.

SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA: I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether the accuracy of the target and the timing of the blast confirm the belief that there ought to have been some inner link of the terrorists maybe, with the army ranks acting in collusion with the terrorists.

I would also like to know whether it is a fact that such a tragic incident was unthinkable, that too within the high security area, which houses a museum of arms and ammunition seized from terrorists where high foreign dignitaries are often taken round. Since it serves as a

†The Question was artuallly asked in the floor of the House by Shrimati Veena Verma.

strong evidence of Pakistan's involvement in terrorism, did the Government have a review of the security arrangements made for such high security zones in the country to plug the loopholes and remove the anomalies? I would also like to know whether the Government has taken any steps or is taking any steps to identify the culprits within the ranks.

SHRI MALLIKARJUN: Madam, as far as the security is concerned, this Field Ordnance Depot has a three-tier security arrangement. The outer cordon is manned by the BSF personnel. The middle cordon is taken care of by the Defence Security Guards and the inner cordon is taken care of by the Army itself. So far as the security lapse is concerned, there is no such thing. One of the terms and conditions referred to the Court of Inquiry was to find out the security lapse. So far as the other inquiry which the hon. Member has mentioned is concerned, I cannot say anything at this stage.

श्री सुशीलकुमार संभाजीराव शिन्दे : महोदया, इस सरकार को यह पता चला कि जब बहुत महत्वपूर्ण इंटलीजेंस के वहां चीफ आ रहे थे आर्मी के, या ऐसे भी कुछ इंसीडेंस हुए हैं तो जब भी कोई वी.आई.पी. वहां जाते हैं तो तो राइफल से गोलियां निकाल ली जाती हैं। क्योंकि यह संभावना होती है उस वक्त कि कभी भी वी.आई.पी. के साथ धोखा हो सकता है और इसीलिए यह नार्म्स बदले गए हैं। अभी जो राइफल देते हैं गार्ड आफ आनर्स के वक्त उस समय भी गोलियां निकाल लेते हैं। यहां इंटलीजेंस के चीफ जा रहे थे आर्मी के तो जब यहां टेररिस्टों ने इतनी दवा दारू मंगाई थी... **(व्यवधान)** ...दारू गोला सही।

Instead of saying 'ammunition, I was trying to put it in proper Hindi.

मैं यह जानना चाहता हूं कि जब ऐसे वी.आई.पी. जाते हैं तब जो अमुनिशन होते हैं या जो बम होते हैं उनको डिफ्यूज करने की सूचनायें दी गई थीं या नहीं दी गई थीं अगर नहीं दी गई होंगी तो एक अलग मैसेज लेकर इसके आगे वैसा मैनुअल में कुछ रखने का सोचा या नहीं ?

SHRI MALLIKARJUN: Madam, whenever such explosives, or improvised explosive devices are found from the terrorists or militants or anybody else, according to our Manual, that the officers should immediately defuse these devices. So, all those arms were defused ones. The reason why they have been kept is to use them for training and other purposes. In this case, these things were brought from some other depot to be displayed to the designated Director General of Military Intelligence and other wings. Earlier to that also, these things were shown to some of the diplomats who had been to Kashmir. In fact, for the past two or three months, these devices were brought, shown and taken back.

श्री सुन्दर सिंह भंडारी : सरकार ने अमुनिशन और एक्सपलोसिव जब्त किए हुए हैं और काफी बड़ी मात्रा में पिछले अनेक समय से जब्त किए हुए हैं। इन्स्पैक्शन के लिए या बाहर के कुछ लोग आयें उनको दिखाने के लिए उनका कहीं न कहीं प्रयोग किया जाए यह एक उपयोग है। क्या सरकार इन डम्प किए गए हथियारों का और भी उपयोग करना चाहती है या केवल इक्ट्ठा करके रखना यही उसका एक मात्र उपयोग रह गया है? क्या इस डम्प किए हुए हथियार में से, बार्डर एरियाज में हमारे नागरिकों को जो हथियारों की जरूरत है उनको दिए जा सकते हैं और दिए जा सकते हैं तो क्या इस संबंध में कोई कदम उठाए गए हैं ?

SHRI MALLIKARJUN: In fact, Madam, when such things are found from the militants or terrorists, we have to deposit them at the police station. But, somehow or the other, because of the existing situation in Kashmir, these things

[Shri Mallikarjun]

could not be deposited there. Therefore they were kept in a separate military regiment, in the magaizine, as we call it, for storing. And they were all defused and they are of no use. Actually, they have been kept for... (*Interruptions*)

SHRI SIKANDER BAKHT: But what happened ultimately?

SHRI MALLIKARJUN: So, they are the defused ones. And, some of these defused arms were kept for training purposes... (*Interruptions*)

SHRI SUNDER SINGH BHANDARI: What about other types of ammunition like rifles and other things?

SHRI MALLIKARJUN: As regards whether they would be utilised on the other types of ammunition also, the hon. Member asked whether they would be utilised on the borders. No, they will not be utilised and they will be... (Interruptions).

SHRI VIREN J. SHAH: Why are they not being utilised?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shri Triloki Nath Chaturvedi

SHRI TRILOKI NATH CHATURVEDI: Madam, another question was put earlier also in this House on the same subject and a written reply was given to that question in which a reference was made to the Court of Enquiry. In the reply given today, the Court of Enquiry was not initially mentioned. But subsequently the hon. Minister mentioned about the setting up of the Court of Enquiry. In view of a number of delicate points raised in the earlier question, a fairly cautious reply was given. Does he not think that the storage for display is also some kind of a temporary storage? Since in the handling of the explosives, many other civilian employees had been employed, is it not fair on the part of the Minister or does he not deem it correct to say that he will come before the House with full details when the Court of Enquiry submits its detailed report?

SHRI MALLIKARJUN: Madam, the nature of the question today is slightly different from the nature of the question which was put earlier. In the question put earlier, it was asked whether any Court of Enquiry was instituted. For that reason, it has not been mentioned in the main reply. So far as the report of the Court of Enquiry is concerned, we hope that it will be submitted shortly. If the august House feels that it should be placed before it, there is no problem in placing the report before the House.

SHRI JAGMOHAN: Madam, may I know from the hon. Minister whether there have been any incidents, not of this nature? There were incidents of fire in the depots, there were incidents of deaths, etc. When the Court of Enquiry was instituted, was it established that there was any sabotage? I am not talking about the Srinagar incident. I am talking of incidents in Delhi.

SHRI MALLIKARJUN: Madam, apart this incident, there were other incidents also. In fact, for any reason if any explosion takes place in any depot, there is a risk for those inspecting officers who are there. Normally we don't expect such things. But for any reason if an explosion takes place, then it is an unfortunate incident. Such incidents took place earlier also.

Pending pension cases in defenct departments

*644. SHRI MISA R. GANESAN: †

SHRI TINDIVANAM G. VENKATRAMAN:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) what is the total number of applications for pension to ex-armymen in defence departments;

†The Question was actually asked in the floor of the House by Shri Misa R. Ganesan.